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William Maginn and the Denial of Authorship: The text of the Colby Lecture at the Annual Meeting of the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals, University of Delaware, 2014

David E. Latané Jr.

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It is a great honor to be standing before you today as the co-recipient of the Colby Prize, especially when I consider the quality of the work in our field represented by the list of finalists and by Fionnuala Dillane's superb *Before George Eliot: Marian Evans and the Periodical Press*. My thanks to the committee and the society.

1. How it all began.

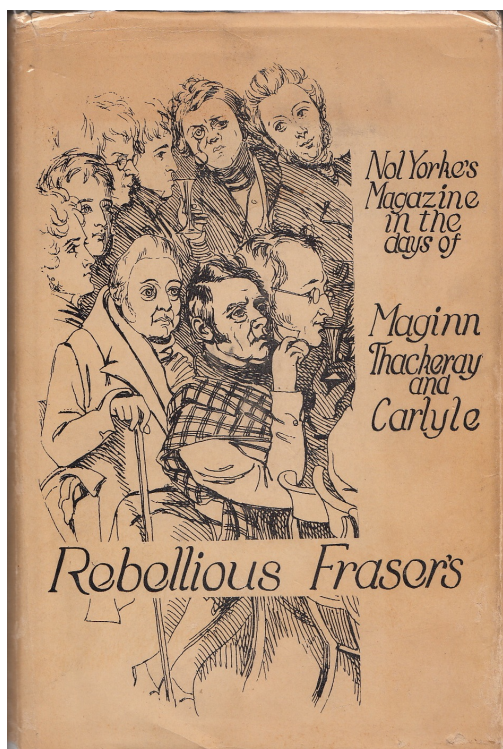
"William Maginn and the Denial of Authorship" was the working title of the book I intended to write. For many monographs, the final title emerges from a discussion with the publisher about the practicalities of marketing. This was not the case with *William Maginn and the British Press: A Critical Biography*. I did not start out to write a biography, but to answer a question: why would an immensely learned and gifted man dedicate himself to writing, but not wish to be known as an "author"? In using the word "author" I will mean the prominent association of the name with a coherent oeuvre: the sort of name that can be transformed into a critical adjective: for example Byronic or Keatsian. Since the enlightenment, writers—that is the historical persons wielding pens—have generally had the ambition to have their name

perform this author-function. Maginn, I surmised, not only habitually denied the authorship of specific works when queried, which was common enough not only for magazinists but even for notables like Walter Scott, he implicitly repudiated authorship itself, or at least the utility of a legal name attached to a body of writing. His reasons for doing so and the effect of his denial, I hoped to prove, were significant. In the preface to Halkett and Lang, the great Victorian *Dictionary of the Anonymous and Pseudonymous Literature of Great Britain*, it is stated that “Generally the motive [for anonymity] is some kind of timidity, such as a) diffidence, b) fear of consequences, and c) shame” (in Mullan 6). None of these motives seemed to apply to Maginn’s case. The cultural bias defined the signature as brave; the pseudonym as cowardly. So I will talk this morning about the book that I did not write, and how I came to write a biography instead.

Like many questions we pursue, my curiosity about Maginn’s relation to authorship began with personal experience. As a teenager (I blush) I liked the idea of being an author, specifically a poet. The words on the page that moved me were inseparable from the image conjured by the names: Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Donne, T. S. Eliot. As an undergraduate at a liberal arts college, I published in and then edited a student literary magazine called *The Natural Child*, after a line in Shakespeare. But there was also on campus a secret club inspired by the 18th-century Scriblerians that published an anonymous satiric paper titled *One Thing and Another*. After a couple of years I received a black feather in the mail which signaled that I was being recruited to this club, and I discovered that detaching one’s text from one’s name was at least as rewarding as owning up. The renown of *perhaps maybe* having been the author of something seemed to be better than the vanity of flaunting the signature. Collaborative writing with the others in *One Thing and Another* also seemed less

constrained—and definitely more fun. It wasn't very long afterwards that I could no longer remember which parts of the paper I had contributed, and which came from the other members. My poetic ambitions quickly waned, and graduate school beckoned.

American graduate study was once a bit hierarchical: British literature more prestigious than American lit or composition; major writers more than minor; poets more than novelists. Periodicals? not mentioned. I thus found myself, a few years later, sitting in a carrel in a library sub-basement attempting to finish a dissertation that would foolishly attempt to encompass both William Blake and Robert Browning. And perhaps Jacques Derrida. But the sub-basement had something else: just outside my door were seldom consulted bound volumes of nineteenth-century periodicals—great long rows of them-- *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, *Punch*; or, *The London Charvari*, *The London Quarterly Review*, and *The Monthly Repository*—in which I knew “Porphyria's Lover” had first appeared, anonymously. The early volumes of *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, in particular, were rich and strange, and I located and read the one study available: Miriam Thrall's magnificent *Rebellious Fraser's: Nol Yorke's Magazine in the Days of Maginn, Thackeray, and Carlyle*, published in 1934.



Thrall was captivated by Maginn, and makes him into an appealing character—with flaws, of course, but a brilliant, witty, and underrated man of letters who was almost single-handedly responsible for the best early Victorian literary magazine. Her explanation for his seeming indifference to fame was that he was a man out of his time, “a Rabelaisian scholar who chose to write himself down in the periodicals of his day” rather than a Victorian “man of affairs” (161-62). Terry Eagleton much later defined Maginn this way as well, in his essay “Cork and the Carnavalesque,” but it didn’t seem like the whole story to me. Rabelais, after all, wrote some masterpieces.

2. The Myth of the Romantic Myth about Genius

My interest was piqued, and Maginn’s appeal also lay in the challenge he presented to the received opinion that, when it came to authorship, the Romantic era valued genius, originality, and high aspiration above all else. Christine Haynes, in an essay in *Book History*, notes that this image had been developing in aesthetic theory simultaneously in England,

Germany, and France since the mid-eighteenth century, until the author came to be defined “as an autonomous individual inspired by ‘originality,’ ‘sincerity,’ or ‘genius’ (287). This view of the author is connected with what another critic has termed the “high romantic model of subjectivity as a coherent, organic, and transhistorical reality” (Cope 364). Romantic-era writers were said to model their subjectivity and their art around the concept of the genius. Lonely Byron occupied his solo time in Greece in 1811 rereading Isaac D’Israeli’s *The Literary Character Illustrated by the History of Men of Genius*, in which he was instructed that “solitude is the nurse of enthusiasm, and enthusiasm is the parent of genius” (E 60). When D’Israeli went to revise his essay in 1818 he worked from Byron’s copy, with marginalia.

3. The Death of the Author debate.

Another part of my grad-school zeitgeist was important as well: the debate over the “Death of the Author” in the 1960s and 1970s started by Roland Barthes, and then Foucault, William Gass, Alexander Nehamas, E. D. Hirsh, et alia. In his most famous essay, Barthes wrote “We now know that a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the message of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (146). Few among the prevailing new critics would have defended a single theological meaning for any sophisticated text, but scholars of the British Romantics—meaning chiefly the big six—had a canon of works such as *The Prelude*, *Jerusalem*, *Don Juan* that seemed wielded to their historical writers. “Text” as a “multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash,” however, sounded to me very much like the unauthored parodic collages found in many issues of *Blackwood’s* or *Fraser’s*, which I had learned to personify as “Maga” and

“Regina.”

My interest was aroused in the disconnect between this received notion of the Romantic genius author, the novel post-structuralist theories that seemed to inscribe a freeplay of creative reading, and the presence outside the library carrel of the early volumes of *Maga* and *Regina* that in the midst of the cult of genius seemed to present as pure writerly text. I might add, blushing again, that I don’t think I knew at this point of the existence of the *Wellesley Index*. I was also thinking that the discourse of these periodicals might be given precedence in the death of the author. Barthes had argued that “Mallarme was doubtless the first to see and to foresee in its full extent the necessity to substitute language itself for the person who until then had been supposed to be its owner” (143). The unowned and disowned and appropriated articles, poems, letters of these self-conscious periodicals seemed to push back the date from Mallarme’s mid-nineteenth-century to the late-Romantic period.

4. Maga and Regina as authorless texts

Thrall showed me that at the center of both magazines was an obscure Irishman, William Maginn, and her celebration of his abilities—in essence his polylingual quicksilver genius—made me wonder why he didn’t attempt, in Coleridge’s phrase, to write a masterpiece to insert in “the archives of mankind” along with to the “linkéd lay of truth” that was the canon (“To William Wordsworth”). Wasn’t that what every good Romantic wanted to do?

Maginn’s “genius” seemed to shine best in his love of gregarious pastiche, of the inescapable intertext. He once wrote William Blackwood offering to write a riposte to Isaac D’Israeli, titled “on parody” (8 March 1823; Cooke 305), and for Maginn the parody switch was always on. Despite Thrall’s construction of Maginn as a *sincere* progressive Tory, he

was sometimes insincere. While Maginn believed in personal honor, it was an honor of the person and not of bodiless text, and the two were separable. Some of Maginn's opinions are hard to pin down, but not this separation of text and body. He told Blackwood in 1821, "You ought not to let your own name appear so openly as editor" (5 November 1821; Cooke 175). He sat down in Saunder's Hotel in London in the summer of 1823 and admonished John Wilson not to claim authorship: it is "my most decided advice that you do not come forward, as it would be of no good possible, and might bring harm. No honour can be gained by coming forward, or lost by remaining behind" (30 June 1823; NLS MS 14836 f92). He tried as a joke to foist the authorship of one of his best *Blackwood's* stories, "The Man in the Bell," off on the Whig politician Henry Brougham. When an irate reporter for the *Times*, John Conway, tried to get Blackwood to give up Maginn's name over what he perceived as a personal insult, Maginn argued to Conway that no such libel was possible against a "newspaper paragraph," even if it would be inexcusable against an "acknowledged author" (to J. Conway, 26 Oct. 1821; Cooke 165-66). In a recent essay on "John Wilson and Regency Authorship," Richard Cronin notes that "authors become heroic only by virtue of a clear and unproblematic relationship between the body of the text and the body of the writer" (205-06). Dueling was heroic, but unnecessary for an insult to a body of text, though Maginn offered to go to London to provide personal satisfaction. So far as newspaper paragraphs went, Maginn might agree with Barthes' dictum, "it is language which speaks, not the author."

As I began thinking about Maginn along these lines, an article in *ELH* in 1992 by Peter Murphy, "Impersonation and Authorship in Romantic Britain," showed the way for an understanding of the early writers for *Blackwood's*. Murphy saw how "They often look like people with a severe allergy to the appearance of the personal or bodily in the abstract world

of writing” (628) and had “a nearly obsessive interest in the interaction, attachment and slippage between authors (published names) and persons (bodies indicated by names)” (626). He usefully distinguishes between “pseudo-authors” and “pseudo-persons” in Maga’s discourse, showing how its use of these for “personalities” went far beyond prior practice: “*Blackwood's Magazine* begins to look like a strange sort of tactical warfare aimed at destroying the world of public discourse and interaction” (633). Maginn seemed like the tactician of this assault, and the one who carried it into the 1830s. Maga’s carnivalesque and proto-post-modern textual whirl as theorized by Murphy and others was thus an exciting challenge to the truisms about authorship at this time.

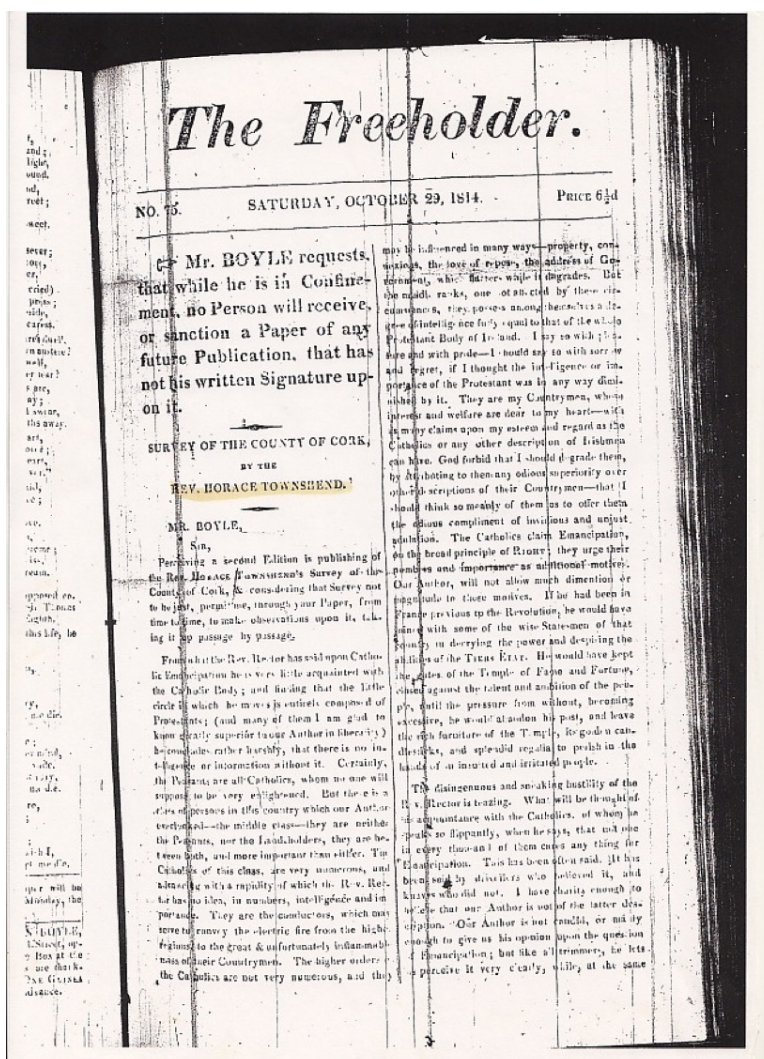
I planned, then, to use Maginn as a springboard for an anatomy of the years between “Romantic” and “Victorian”—one that would take into account modern theories of authorship, textuality, reception, and national identity. Other intriguing writers, such as Robert Macnish (“the Modern Pythagorean”), D.M. Moir (Δ), Francis Mahony (“Father Prout”), and John Wilson (“Christopher North”), were to be constellated with Maginn in order to theorize the nature of a large body of writing--poetical, critical, satirical, political--that consistently denied the traditional unities and signatures of authorship. Nationality would also come into play, as all of the writers I would be considering were Irish (Catholic and Protestant) or Scottish.

5. Maginn again

That, then, was the book I intended to write. But my first step meant everything gang agley: I wrote the entry on Maginn for the *New Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and discovered that the simplest fact—the year in which he was born—had yet to be pinned

down, and several of the books routinely listed under his name in library catalogs he either did not write, or probably did not write. The two nineteenth-century biographical essays, by Maginn's young friend Edward Vaughan Kenealy and Robert Sheldon Mackenzie, were only sporadically trustworthy, and Mackenzie's five-volume *Miscellaneous Writings of the Late Dr. Maginn* contained hundreds of pages of material written by other men. OK, I thought, I'll write a biographical introduction and sort all that out. Never having contemplated writing a biography, I did not suspect that, in the words of a reviewer of the book I eventually published, "Writing about the life of William Maginn might have been devised by some fiendish examiner as an impossible challenge" (Mitchell 12).

It wasn't that fiendish, but I wouldn't boast about definitiveness either. Because I knew that in the 1930s Thrall had been in contact with descendants of Maginn's daughter Ellen (who married a man named Scott) as well as Maginn's nephew, the Rev. Charles Maginn, visions of that Boswell-papers-in-the-hayloft sort of discovery danced in my head. The search, however, proved fruitless. But I did have the advantage over Thrall in increasingly being able to search on line, in having the transcripts of the Maginn / Blackwood correspondence made by Helen Cooke for her Master's Thesis at Texas Tech, and then, with no tenure-clock ticking, having the leisure to travel over a number of years to archives in Britain and America. Much of Maginn's life, however, was and remains sparsely documented: in addition to the Blackwood material, good amounts only survive from his friend Thomas Crofton Croker, from Richard Bentley, and in the papers of Edward Vaughan Kenealy, who only knew Maginn in his last few years. A real revelation came from visiting Cork, where I could read the microfilm of a sporadically published paper titled *The Freeholder*, edited by a colorful neighbor of the Maginns, John Boyle.



There was also a very shortlived paper by Maginn just called *Something New*. These and other survivals of the culture of Cork when Maginn was young explained a great deal, as did, in an undefined way, simply looking at the door of Maginn's forlorn old house where he ground the young Corkonians in Latin and Greek for a decade, or the Church in which he married a clergyman's daughter, as well as the general layout of the town with the river Lee.



[Doorway to the Maginn house in Cork, 2000; my photo]



[Christ's Church, Cork, 2000; my photo]

The more I dug, the more the hermeneutic circle whirled, until I saw Maginn not as text or author-function but as a unique man shaped by the contingencies of his time and place. And while I still believe he had strangely little ambition, I found that he could primarily be thought of not as an author-manqué (which was the Victorian view) or as a canny pre-post-structuralist (my hope), but as a “Gentleman of the Press.” Most newspapermen in the 1820s probably had little ambition to become “authors,” and what the glitter of Maginn’s talents and worshipful commentary on him from Kenealy to Thrall obscured, I discovered, was that Maginn was always a newspaperman, and went to London specifically to work in newspapers. In 1821 he told Blackwood about a scouting trip to London, proclaiming “I shall live among newspaper people principally” and “I shall cut Cork. I shall have nothing to do however with booksellers--for that is a precarious livelihood and not agreeable” (29 October 1821; Cooke 168). When Maginn gave up his day job, turned his classical academy in Cork over to his brother John, and married in 1824, he specifically eschewed literary fame as a motive. He arrived scoffing at the pretensions of capital “L” literary London.

6. Maginn’s written and unwritten books

Digging in the biographical record did expose the trajectory by which Maginn moved to become an “author.” From their first acquaintance, Blackwood was alarmed at Maginn’s newspaper connections, and exhorted him to exert himself, to stop frittering away his talents and write something that would last. Simultaneously Scott’s son-in-law Lockhart prodded Maginn to stop being the great unknown unknown. In 1824, while the pair were meeting to drink at the Blue Posts in London, Lockhart taxed Maginn to do more, to make a name, and Maginn replied: “As to my writing serious things--what can I write about? I am at work with maxims. Ebony will publish them after we are done in a book. [. . .] If you will co-operate I

should commence” (9 August 1824; NLS MS 924 v2: f48). Writing for Maginn remained social and cooperative. London’s dozens of newspapers hummed with a music he liked to hear.

From 1824 until 1830, however, Maginn did make a series of half-hearted attempts to write books. In April of 1824 he showed Lockhart the start of a romance, which never went any further; the collection of maxims mentioned above appeared in *Maga*, but were only made into a book after Maginn’s death. He began a novel while living in Paris in the Spring of 1826, but when he was called back by John Murray to try to salvage the new daily newspaper, *The Representative*, it was laid aside. He did publish one novel, anonymously, mostly written in early 1827. Lockhart and Maginn had begun a magazine parody of the rubbishy historical novels of Horace Smith. In Maginn’s hands it quickly grew into a remarkable satire based on the premise that it was an historical novel written in the far future about England in the 1820s—this licensed all sorts of distortions and comical errors. Blackwood, however, rejected it and Maginn published with the obscure firm of W. Marsh. *Whitehall; Or, the Days of George IV* provides a case study in how not to succeed as a novelist, though it did serve as the required book publication that allowed his widow to apply to the Royal Literary Fund after his death.

In the summer of the same year Ellen Maginn returned to Ireland, and Maginn gave up their lodgings and moved into the Somerset Hotel to write. This was as close as he ever came to seeking the solitude necessary for the Romantic genius. He banned his friend Crofton Croker from spilling his location to new arrivals from Cork. At the end of the summer, he sent the complete draft of a novel, seemingly the reflections of a Paris *flaneur*, to Blackwood. The manuscript seems to have disappeared after Blackwood gave it to David

Moir to read, but Maginn never made a serious attempt to recover or rewrite it. This manuscript, along with any trace of Maginn's translation of Brillat-Savarin's famous essay on gastronomie, "La Physiologie du Goût," which was first published in Paris in the month that Maginn arrived, are the two items I regret not finding in the mythical hayloft. In these same years, he may have been the first translator of the *Mémoires de Vidocq*, and on very slight evidence has gone into library catalogues as the author of a true-crime book in 1828, *The Red Barn, a Tale; Founded in Fact*. If these two items are true, a case could be made for Maginn having an influence on much later popular culture around crime.

Though he vowed not to, Maginn thus did have recourse to the precarious living offered by booksellers. But the nebulousness of his activity, the lack of any self-puffing, still shows him rejecting authorship. Traces of ambition reside entirely on the more scholarly side. In February 1828, Maginn is for the first time seriously named as a possible author, when in the *Literary Gazette* either William Jerdan or Letitia Landon announced that he was preparing a volume titled *Tales from the Talmud*. This mention brought an unpleasant reminder that a book with Maginn's name on it would be instantly attacked, as the advanced announcement brought libels on his knowledge of Hebrew. Over a year later *Tales from the Talmud* was still being mentioned in the press, but it too was never published.

7. Maginn's Gallery

Which brings us to 1830, and the launch of *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*. *Fraser's* inevitably pushed Maginn forward. The *Lancaster Gazette*, for instance, outs an early essay "from the pen, we have been told, of Dr. Maginn" ("Fraser's Magazine for December"). Given Maginn's existence in the shadows, it is ironic that he is now chiefly

associated with a feature that put the spotlight on celebrity, “The Gallery of Illustrious Literary Characters.” Much of the recent work on the early *Fraser’s* has focused on the “Gallery,” by scholars such as Judith Fisher, Linda Peterson, David Higgins, and others. Carol Bock, in “Authorship, the Brontës, and *Fraser’s Magazine*: Coming Forward as an Author in Early Victorian England,” has constructed an argument to show how the gallery served the development of the Victorian notion of the dignity authorship. What’s certain is that the combination of pithy and ironic letterpress with informal and sometimes satiric lithographs opened a new chapter in the way literary figures were presented to the public.

To the disgruntlement of William Blackwood, it was in *Fraser’s* that Maginn claimed the character of “Morgan Odoherty,” hijacking him permanently from the pages of *Maga*. The first significant step in Maginn’s movement towards authorship, then, was this ownership of a pseudonym, even if one still a bit unstable. This was accomplished quite deliberately. Odoherty first appears in issue four of *Fraser’s* in the “Election of the Editor,” a mock public meeting. “You want an Editor, you tell us, sir,” Odoherty begins

as my friend Byron used to say, ‘an uncommon want,’ when every rascally magazine and review can furnish one cut and dry, salted and packed, wholesale, retail, and for exportation. For my own part, I have written for all sorts, kinds, manners, and persuasions of periodicals, and I find them all pretty much the same—very considerable damned deal of humbug in the internal regulation of their affairs. (507)

This statement accurately reflects Maginn’s own opinions. Next, a notice appeared in the Sunday newspaper *The Age*, one of Maginn’s outlets, certifying the death of Odoherty and

his future absence from *Maga*. *Fraser's* responded in the sixth issue (July 1830) with a "Letter from Sir Morgan O'Doherty, Bart., to the Editor of *Fraser's Magazine*," in order to mark Odoherly's official rebirth as a Fraserian:

To convince you, Sir, that I am still alive, I willingly accede to your request of writing for your Magazine, which, in your note, you call the most intellectual and independent ever established. In so saying, Sir, you are perfectly right. Stick to that: boldly declare your own merits, and you will get no small circle to believe you at last.
(688)

Amusingly enough, the book review that follows, which we are told is the first contribution by reborn Odoherly, is itself signed "Dixi": the pseudonym of a pseudonym.

Maginn uses Odoherly not only as a mask / pseudoauthor, but as a way of debating the embodiment of himself as both Odoherly and, perhaps in the future, "William Maginn LL.D." An example: in March 1831 appeared "Ars Ridendi; Or, Hook and Hood—on Laughter," probably co-authored by Maginn and Lockhart, which turns from a consideration of their mutual friend Theodore Hook to an exhortation for the fictional Odoherly to step out of the shade:

People would know him better, and like him quite as well, we think, in his corporate shape, as they do in his present scattered, shadowy, undefined condition. He has expended, and is still expending, great wealth of mind in enriching daily, weekly, monthly, and annual publications. Half of what he does will be overlaid by the

surrounding trash, and forgotten [. . .] *Nominis umbra*—that will be all our children will know of the famous adjutant [. . .] unless [. . .] he “stirs his stumps,” and stands in all his united powers face to face with the public. If he will *not* do this—if he perversely choose to exist in his phantom state, (his strength, like Samson’s, “diffused” over infinite space,) why then, O, winged fame! O, fickle fortune! [. . .] never let him be pushed aside or neglected in after time for smaller jesters or bold pretenders, nor for any proselyte or copyist, who shall attempt to imitate his inimitable style! (161)

Odohertry slash Maginn tweaking daily, weekly, monthly, and annual periodicals is omnipresent, but wrecked and powerless, as the allusion to the chorus of *Samson Agonistes* makes clear:

See how he lies at random, carelessly diffused,
 With languished head unpropt,
 As one past hope, abandoned,
 And by himself given over,
 In slavish habit, ill-fitted weeds
 O’er-worn and soiled.

To become corporate, to fuse body and text,—which would mean to abandon the company of protean collaborators and the tool of mutating signatures—is to concentrate strength and make reputation. Like any desire for authorship it is a grab for immortality, to be a name that

shines in the sun rather than hides in the shadows. Which brings us back to the “Illustrious Literary Characters.”

The title of this series is a direct nod to Isaac D’Israeli, whose work focuses on the oddities of the people, rather than their authorship of particular works. Maginn’s response to D’Israeli was not an essay on parody, but *Fraser’s* series of mostly satiric takes on the character of living literati, not all of whom would be recognized by readers as “authors.” That makes the inclusion of himself both reasonable and surprising.

In the final number of the second volume that marks *Fraser’s* first year of publication, the “Gallery” featured “The Doctor” (716).



William Maginn

“THE DOCTOR”

Published by James Fraser, 215 Regent Street, London

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Original from
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

This was the only one of the entire series—except for the fictional Tydus-Pooh-Pooh and the group portraits—not titled by a proper name. The letterpress, probably by Lockhart, begins by proclaiming the attachment of image to a different name: the “Ensign and Adjutant Sir Morgan O’Doherty.” This Odoherty, who has planted his standard, is requested to “sit still” so that the public “may familiarize itself with your outward mannikin.” In this usage the pseudoauthor Odoherty is the large and presumptively real entity and the little man is the one in the lithograph and Gallery, identified as “The Doctor,” who is an “extraordinary specimen.” He is described as a prematurely graying 37-year-old who had shaved his hair the year before after the passage of the Catholic Relief Act and now wears a “nut-brown scratch” wig. “The Doctor” leads a strictly compartmentalized life, one-third devoted to the public, one third to being one’s “own man,” one third to family. His motto is *carpe diem*. The confusion as to who this is continues into the third paragraph. Odoherty is alternately a Baronet, an Ensign, an Adjutant, and the Standard-Bearer or *Signifer* but never a “Doctor.” But fusion occurs as Maginn’s real history is unrolled:

Whether shining a precocious gem, in Trinity College, Dublin—or illuminating the young ideas of the Corkers—or sustaining the power and glory of Blackwood—or now co-editing the grand, unrivalled, staunch, sturdy organ of orthodoxy, the *Standard*—(we say nothing of a casual contribution to *Regina*) the redoubted O’Doherty has always been, is, and ever will be, the jovial also, the simple-hearted, the careless, and the benignant. FLOREAT Doctor!

The name on the image of “Odoherty” is “The Doctor”; the signature however, is “William Maginn”—who thus peeks out, if not as an author, at least as a three-headed character. The image, in which Robert Lapp sees “a slim man of fashion, impeccably dressed and jauntily posed” (240) perhaps flatters. Notice however the central change from Daniel Maclise’s original drawing (found in the National Portrait Gallery) – the addition of a swarm of papers and books, all of which, except for the note in his hand, appearing to be blank. Are these Odoherty slash Maginn’s unwritten works?

“William Maginn” as author appeared in earnest in 1837 in the first real Victorian journal, *Bentley’s Miscellany*, edited of course by Charles Dickens. In his last six years—in addition to continuous newspaper work—he published innovative translations and commentaries on Homer, a series of essays on Shakespeare’s characters, and began an historical novel, *John Manesty, Liverpool Merchant*, that would have been published under his own name. His friends had for years urged him to collect and republish his best pieces, which he did too late as *Magazine Miscellanies*. It was, sadly enough, this project that sent him to the Fleet Prison for a stay that contributed to his death from tuberculosis and alcoholism at age forty-eight.

MAGAZINE MISCELLANIES.

BY DR. MAGINN.

A STORY WITHOUT A TAIL.

CHAPTER I.

HOW WE WENT TO DINE AT JACK GINGER'S.

So it was finally agreed upon that we should dine at Jack Ginger's chambers in the Temple, seated in a lofty story in Essex-court. There was, besides our host, Tom Meggot, Joe Macgillicuddy, Humpy Harlow, Bob Burke, Antony Harrison, and myself. As Jack Ginger had little coin and no credit, we contributed each our share to the dinner. He himself provided room, fire, candle, tables, chairs, tablecloth, napkins—no, not napkins; on second thoughts we did not bother ourselves with napkins—plates, dishes, knives, forks, spoons (which he borrowed from the wig-maker), tumblers, lemons, sugar, water, glasses, decanters—by-the-bye, I am not sure that there were decanters—salt, pepper, vinegar, mustard, bread, butter (plain and melted), cheese, radishes, potatoes, and cookery. Tom Meggot was a cod's head and shoulders, and oysters to match—Joe Macgillicuddy, a boiled leg of pork, with pease-pudding—Humpy Harlow, a sirloin of roast beef, with horseradish—Bob Burke, a gallon of half-and-half, and four bottles of whisky, of prime quality ("Posteen," wrote the Whiskymen, "I say, by Jupiter, but of which many-facture He alone knows")—Antony Harrison, half-a-dozen of port, he having tick to that extent at some unfortunate wine-merchant's—and I supplied cigars & discretion, and a bottle of rum, which I borrowed from a West Indian friend of mine as I passed by. So that, on the whole, we were in no danger of suffering from any of the extremes of hunger and thirst for the course of that evening.

We met at five o'clock—sharp—and very sharp. Not a man was missing when the clock of the Inner Temple struck the last stroke. Jack Ginger had done everything to admiration. Nothing could be more splendid than his turn-out. He had superintended the cooking himself of every individual dish with his own eyes—or rather eye—he having but one, the other having been lost in a skirmish when he was a midshipman on board a pirate in the Brazilian service. "Ah!" said Jack, often and often, "these were my honest days—Gad—did I ever think when I was a pirate that I was at the end to turn rogue, and study the law."—All was accurate to the utmost degree. The table-cloth, to be sure, was not exactly white, but it had been washed last week, and the collection of the plates was miscellaneous, exhibiting several of the choicest patterns of Delf. We were not of the silver-fork school of poetry, but steel is not to be despised. If the table was somewhat rickety, the inequality in the legs was supplied by clapping a volume of Vesey under the short one. As for the chairs—but why weary about details—chairs being made to be sat upon, it is sufficient to say that they answered their purposes, and whether they had backs or not—whether they were cane-bottomed, or hair-bottomed, or rush-bottomed, is nothing to the present inquiry.

Jack's habits of discipline made him punctual, and dinner was on the table in less than three minutes after five. Down we sat, hungry as hunters, and eager for the prey.

"Is there a parson in company?" said Jack Ginger, from the head of the table.

"No," responded I, from the foot.

"Then, thank God," said Jack, and proceeded, after this pious grace, to distribute the cod's head and shoulders to the hungry multitude.

CHAPTER II.

HOW WE DINED AT JACK GINGER'S.

The history of that cod's head and shoulders would occupy but little space to write. Its flakes, like the snow flakes on a river, were for one moment bright, then gone for ever; it perished unpitably. "Bring hither," said Jack, with a firm voice, "the leg of pork." It appeared, but soon to disappear again. Not a man of the company but showed his abhorrence of the Judaical practice of abstaining from the flesh of swine. Equally clear in a few moments was it that we were truly British in our devotion to beef. The sirloin was impartially destroyed on both sides, upper and under. Dire was the clatter of the knives, but deep the silence of the guests. Jerry Gallagher, Jack's valet-de-chambre, footman, cook, clerk, shoeblack, aide-de-camp, scout, confidant, dun-chaser, bum-delfer, and many other offices in commendam, tolled like a hero. He covered himself with glory and gravy every moment. In a short time a vociferation arose for fluid, and the half-and-half—Whitbread quartered upon Chamytou—beautiful heraldry!—was inhaled with the most savage satisfaction.

"The pleasure of a glass of wine with you, Bob Burke," said Joe Macgillicuddy, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

"With pleasure, Joe," replied Bob.

"What wine do you choose? You may as well say port, for there is no other; but attention to manners always be comes a gentleman."

"Port, then, if you please," cried Joe, "as the ladies of Limerick say, when a man looks at them across the table."

"Hobnobbing wastes time," said Jack Ginger, laying down the pot out of which he had been drinking for the last few minutes; "and, besides, it is not customary now in genteel society—so pass the bottle about."

[I here pause in my narrative to state, on more accurate recollection, that we had not decanters; we drank from the black bottle, which Jack declared was according to the fashion of the continent.]

So the port was passed round, and declared to be superb. Antony Harrison received the unanimous applause of the company; and, if he did not blush at all the fine things that were said in his favour, it was because his countenance was of that peculiar hue that no addition of red could be visible upon it. A blush on Antony's face would be like gilding refined gold.

Whether cheese is prohibited or not in the higher circles of the West End, I cannot tell; but I know it was not prohibited in the very highest chambers of the Temple.

"It's double Gloucester," said Jack Ginger; "prime, bought at the corner—Heaven pay the cheesemonger, for I shan't—but, as he is a gentleman, I give you his health."

"I don't think," said Joe Macgillicuddy, "that I ought to demean myself to drink the health of a cheesemonger; but I'll not stop the bottle."

And, to do Joe justice, he did not. Then we attacked the cheese, and in an incredibly short period we battered in a breach of an angle of 45 degrees, in a manner that would have done honour to any engineer that directed the guns at San Sebastian. The cheese, which on its first entry on the table presented the appearance of a plain circle, was soon

8. Summary writing as social media, back to theory.

My original project was doomed from the moment I put "William Maginn" in the title, as the proper name pushed like a magnet against the original premise. Thrall's coinage of the adjective "Maginnish" should have been a warning. Writing the biography showed me that

Maginn was for six years a Victorian author, after a previous twenty essentially as a newspaperman. Maginn was, nevertheless, at the heart of a unique late-Romantic culture that mixed both the high anonymous—such as Scott and his long novels—with the low and highly contagious world of newspapers, in which paragraphs were lifted and reprinted and revised and attributed and misattributed. Since I started down the path, a welcome number of books and articles have appeared going all the way back to Jon Klancher's *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832* in 1987; Mark Parker's *Literary Magazines and British Romanticism* (2000); the essays in the volumes on *Blackwood's*, many by RSVP members, edited by David Finkelstein and Robert Morrison; Karen Fang's *Romantic Writing and the Empire of Signs: Periodical Culture and Post-Napoleonic Authorship* (2010); and, closest to my original aim, David Higgins's *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity, Politics* (2005). Higgins's chapter on "Literary Biography and its Discontents" sums up what first piqued my interest: *Blackwood's* "rhetoric was highly infectious [. . .] because its equivocations about the relationship between private man and public author exposed the contradictory way in which early nineteenth-century culture represented literary genius" (59).

I will close, though, by giving into temptation to talk about the present. When the Victorians began winning the argument against anonymity, and turned increasingly to signed journalism, they did so by characterizing the writing of the 1820s and 1830s in moral terms as vile scurrility. They argued with good reason that the signature is by its nature an expression of morality; it represents a unique mark that accepts rather than defers responsibility. Anonymous writing always carried a taint. In 1810, R. P. Gillies was admonished by his brother: "Many, indeed, may be an author's reasons for adopting this very

prevalent mode: but, comparatively very few of these reasons can be of an honourable nature” (13 June 1810; NLS MS 1809, f.10). Some reasons for anonymity were honorable. Maginn did not take credit or money for helping his friend Crofton Croker complete the *Fairy Legends*, for instance; middle-class morés for women meant that many books were simply “By a Lady.” To the question of honor, the Victorians added the importance of being earnest. When *The Fortnightly Review* embraced signed articles in the 1860s, it stated “Each contributor, in giving his name, will not only give an earnest mark of his sincerity, but will claim the privilege of perfect freedom of opinion, unbiased by the opinions of the Editor or of fellow contributors” (in Nash 57). Oddly enough, the freedom for authors to speak their own mind is the freedom that Maginn claimed for Maga’s pseudoauthors back in 1824. The twenty-seventh of Odoherty’s maxims states: “The great superiority of Blackwood’s Magazine,” it begins, is that “one *can* be allowed to speak one’s mind there. I write in Blackwood, because there Morgan Odoherty *can* be Morgan Odoherty” (605).

By and large true anonymity in magazine writing and book publishing died a Victorian death. *The Economist* is one of the last holdouts, and still has unsigned articles; last week after it withdrew a review of a book on the economics of slavery, the website Gawker seemed to find magazine anonymity quite strange, and urged its readers to email if they knew the author’s name. Gawker is typical of the protean textual world of on-line media, with all the attendant problems. Would Maginn find here a kinship with his time? Some think our new media sound the final dong of the death knell of the Romantic genius: “But the lone genius is a myth that has outlived its usefulness,” writes Joshua Shenk a few weeks ago in the *New York Times*. “Fortunately, a more truthful model is emerging: the creative network, as with the crowd-sourced Wikipedia or the writer’s room at ‘The Daily Show’” (Shenk).

Blackwood's and *Fraser's* both had famous "writer's rooms," But Maginn would surely have appreciated *The Onion*, and perhaps also the fact that In the words of a famous and now decades old *New Yorker* cartoon, "on the internet nobody knows you're a dog" or an "O'Dogerty."



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